

## Gambian educational migration, care and the persistence of the domestic moral economy

Article (Accepted Version)

Kea, Pamela (2020) Gambian educational migration, care and the persistence of the domestic moral economy. *Children's Geographies*, 18 (6). pp. 642-653. ISSN 1473-3285

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/93842/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

### **Copyright and reuse:**

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

# **Gambian Educational Migration, Care and the Persistence of the Domestic**

## **Moral Economy**

Dr. Pamela Kea  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Sussex  
p.j.kea@sussex.ac.uk

**Abstract:**

This article examines Gambians' experiences of educational migration to the UK, social reproduction and care, as they organize and map out educational futures transnationally. They do so in order to be in a position to invest in their children's education, with the aim of consolidating and enhancing the family's accumulated wealth and resources across the generations. Access to social, economic and cultural resources can facilitate migration and affect the nature of educational decision-making. Similarly, grandparents may, through transnational care arrangements, look after children who are separated from their parents. Building on the literature, I highlight the way in which parents' educational and migratory trajectories are entangled with those of their children. It is argued that this entanglement reveals the persistence of the domestic moral economy, informed by intergenerational reciprocity and obligation towards kin. In addition, children's educational futures may be contingent on their parents' educational strategies and migratory trajectories.

**Keywords:** Educational Migration, care, domestic moral economy, The Gambia, Transnationalism

**Introduction**

After completing her A levels in The Gambia, Awa migrated to the UK with her husband, Mustapha who had received a scholarship to study accountancy at a college in North London. They initially lived in a small flat in Northwest London, subsequently moving to a two-bedroom council flat in a quiet and green area of Woolwich, southeast London. Having grown up in a large extended family compound in The Gambia, Awa initially found the loneliness of life in London, the constraints of a small flat, spontaneity in her social life and the lack of support networks very difficult. They were forced to send Muhammed, their eldest son who is now thirteen, back to The Gambia as a toddler to live with his grandparents because of high nursery school costs, lack of care and the demands of juggling work and studies. Yet, they knew their son would be well cared for by Awa's parents, if not by other members of the extended family. While Muhammed was in The Gambia, Awa

studied and worked as a part-time care worker and Mustapha pursued his accountancy studies. At the time of my research in the Spring of 2012, Muhammed was back in the UK attending the local secondary school. Mustapha was working as an accountancy lecturer and Awa as a carer in a nursing home. She planned to train as a primary school teacher at the local University.

Awa and Mustapha's initial migration to the UK, and subsequent care arrangements for Muhammed in The Gambia, convey the importance of educational migration to social mobility, care and social reproduction, '...the material social practices through which people reproduce themselves on a daily and generational basis' (Katz 2001, 709). My understanding of care includes a focus on education, broadly conceived as exposure to specific cultural practices and forms of knowledge. Indeed, their experiences of educational migration, social reproduction and care, as they organize and map out educational futures transnationally, highlight the way in which parents' educational and migratory trajectories are entangled with those of their children. In addition, children's educational futures may be contingent on their parents' educational strategies and migratory trajectories.

It is argued that the entangled nature of parental educational and migratory trajectories with those of their children, underscores the ongoing importance of intergenerational reciprocity and the sense of obligation that underpins kinship relations. The following account reveals the persistence of the domestic moral economy (cf. Peterson and Taylor 2003) to Gambians' educational decision-making and migration. As I discuss in more detail, the domestic moral economy is informed by intergenerational reciprocity and obligation towards kin. With respect to the intergenerational reciprocities that are being mobilized in the context of educational migration, I focus on care and social reproduction. Further, I argue that the domestic

moral economy influences decisions to migrate for education. Such migration may, in turn, be facilitated by kin and friendship networks. Further, the different economic, social and cultural resources at each family's disposal influences their educational decision making, the ease with which they move across borders and their ability to navigate migration legislation. Significantly, migration and transnationalism are resources in themselves. Indeed, mobility is 'one of the major resources of 21<sup>st</sup> century life' and is key to capital accumulation (Creswell 2010, 22). Similarly, Brettell (2006, 329) refers to the 'liberating potential of transnationalism'.

However, Gambian citizens, who travel from The Gambia to the UK, are subjected to strict migration legislation in the form of border controls and visa regulations, thereby frequently separating family members and curtailing their mobility and that of their children (cf. Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004). Despite the transnational nature of many people's lives and celebratory accounts of the permeability of borders, borders have an enduring and powerful effect. This is no more apparent than in the case of Gambians who, unable to travel 'freely' to Europe, travel on 'the back way' across the Sahara to Libya and - for those who are able to escape detention and imprisonment in Libya - across the Mediterranean to Italy. In contrast, the Gambians in my research were relatively well off, and initially travelled to the UK legally on temporary study, visit or family reunification visas.

The material I present draws on research carried out from February 2012 to December 2013 in The UK and The Gambia, followed up by more recent fieldwork in November 2018.<sup>1</sup> I have carried out fieldwork in The Gambia since 1996 and worked closely with the same research assistant. The latter, as well as a number of informants, put me in touch with friends and contacts in the UK, who I interviewed. All of my informants were Mandinka and Muslim, the main ethnic and religious group in The

Gambia. Gambian society is considered to be hierarchical with stratification based on caste, class, descent, ethnic, national, religious and gender differences (Kea 2010).

In both London and The Gambia, I carried out one-to-one interviews, group discussions and observations in family homes, and compounds. I interviewed 7 Gambian migrants (4 mothers, 2 fathers and 1 male child) in the UK, and 12 adult carers, 1 man, 11 women and 5 children (both male and female) in the urban coastal areas and cities in West Coast division in The Gambia. In one case, having interviewed a mother in the UK, I was able to interview her children and the children's carer in The Gambia. The Gambian migrants can be broadly described as middle class in terms of their levels of education, economic position and social status (Spronk 2014, 98). However, the carers in The Gambia were a mixed group: some were educated and engaged in skilled work; and others had very little education, did not work or worked part-time as traders and/or farmers.

I begin by briefly situating my argument in the literature on educational migration and transnationalism. Following an overview of Gambian migration to Britain, I highlight the centrality of the domestic moral economy to Gambian social life, with a focus on fostering and care. I then present several case studies of Gambian migrants to elucidate my argument. I conclude by reflecting on the entangled nature of parents' and their children's educational and migratory trajectories as parents work to secure their children's futures.

### **Educational Migration and Transnationalism**

Research on educational migration highlights the role that education plays in social mobility, social reproduction and the development of livelihood strategies. This is particularly the case in a context where educational and employment

opportunities are limited and the political climate is volatile (e.g. Olwig and Valentin 2015; Berg 2014; Waters 2006; cf. Froere and Portishce 2012, 323). Much of this research underscores the benefits of children's or young adults' educational migration to familial social mobility. For instance, Boyden's (2013, 581) research from *Young Lives*, a study of childhood poverty and education in a number of countries in the South, focuses on the importance of children's education and migration to social reproduction, familial obligations and social mobility. Similarly, in capturing the centrality of children's educational migration to familial social reproduction and mobility, Orellana (2001) and Katz (2008) refer to 'parachute children' and children as 'sites of accumulation' respectively. Further, children's and young adults' educational migration may be central to a family's 'status and lifestyle' (Waters 2015, 285).

In what follows, I focus on Gambian adults who partly choose to undertake transnational educational migration to ensure familial social mobility. They do so in order to be in a position to invest in their children's education, with the aim of consolidating and enhancing the family's accumulated wealth and resources across the generations. Developing on the existing literature, I highlight the entangled nature of parental educational and migratory trajectories with those of their children.

Educational migration (re) produces transnationalism amongst migrants, (Olwig and Valentin 2015, 249; Baas 2006). Similarly, with globalization, we see the creation of time-space compression, characterised by the increasing ease and speed with which travel and communication occur (Harvey 1989), further supporting transnational practices. A transnational approach privileges a focus on networks, 'cross border relationships and patterns of exchange' (Vertovec 2001) across space and time. Consequently, such an approach is crucial to an understanding of

educational planning and migration across generations, at various points in time and in different places (Olwig and Valentin 2015, 9). As we see with the Gambians in my research, they initially migrated to the UK and elsewhere for formal education. Subsequently adopting transnational lives, they continued their studies, stayed on in Europe in order to pursue their careers, returned to The Gambia to visit their children, and / or put into place caring arrangements for their children in The Gambia. Children who are cared for by grandparents and / or other extended family members in The Gambia attend school there and are socialized as Gambians. Some return to the UK to attend school. Such educational decision-making and the transnational practices that underpin these decisions and choices highlight the entangled nature of parents' educational and migratory trajectories with those of their children, as well as the role of economic, cultural and social resources in influencing transnational practices.

### **The context**

West African elites have a long history of travelling to Europe for education (Adi 2012). In the postcolonial period increasing numbers of Gambians have travelled to Europe, particularly Britain, for education and to avail themselves of the opportunities that a wealthy economy presents. A former British colony, The Gambia gained its Independence in 1965. Until as recently as 1999, when The University of The Gambia was established, Gambians have had to travel abroad (e.g. to other West African countries, the UK, Canada, Turkey, China, Eastern Europe) in order to attend University. Historical patterns of educational migration, and contemporary aspirations to migrate to re(produce) social mobility, affect the educational strategies



adopted by Gambian parents and their children, as does the changing political economy.

An agrarian neo-mercantilist state, The Gambia's expanding tourist industry serves as the main earner of foreign exchange. Increasing desertification and drought in the Sahel region, dating from the 1970s, as well as the decreasing value of the groundnut has encouraged Gambians to move from rural to urban areas. Most Gambians live in the urban coastal areas of the country, where tourism prevails.

An unprecedented number of Gambians left the country under Yahya Jammeh's authoritarian regime (1996-2017), leading to further declines in agricultural output. (The percentage of skilled Gambians leaving the country rose to the second highest in Africa (63% in 2000) (Kebbeh 2013). Vision 2016, initially developed in 2007 in which the government set out its policy to enhance agricultural productivity and food self-sufficiency, promoted campaigns that encouraged Gambians to 'Eat what you grow and grow what you eat'. Nonetheless, emigration continued apace: Gambians, as a share of the country's population, were the second largest diaspora in Europe.<sup>2</sup> Incoming remittances as a percentage of gross domestic product are the highest in Africa (Kebbeh 2013). However, with the election of Adama Barrow's coalition government in 2016, many Gambians are returning to the country, as forced and willing returnees.<sup>3</sup> Barrow is actively addressing irregular migration by supporting initiatives such as the Youth Empowerment Project, (YEP Gambia) which gives financial support to budding entrepreneurs. Although, a number of projects have been introduced in The Gambia to discourage mass emigration, many Gambians, as in other parts of the world, will continue to migrate in search of better opportunities elsewhere. This sense of alternative futures available elsewhere privileges future time and progression, both of which underpin educational planning.

Within the Gambian diaspora in the UK there are those who: are classified as settled migrants with permanent residency rights; have British or other European citizenship; have student, visitor or work visas; are asylum claimants and / or irregular migrants, having overstayed their visas. Most Gambians in the UK live in London and other urban areas (e.g. Leeds, Birmingham, Bristol, Manchester and Birmingham).<sup>4</sup> Many migrate to the UK to fulfill aspirations, including educational ambitions – attending University and / or undertaking vocational training -, and to fulfill career aspirations. Some children are left behind with carers in The Gambia, in the hopes that they will be able to join their parents in the UK at a future date. Some, as we see with Muhammed, are sent to The Gambia for care and education. In one case, Mariamma, born in the UK but subsequently raised in The Gambia, was sent back to the UK to secure her migration status and educational future.

### **The Domestic Moral Economy and Transnational Care**

Many Gambians undertake educational migration for social mobility, thereby ensuring they are able to care for and redistribute accumulated wealth to children, parents and extended family members. A migrant's initial journey may be funded by one or more family members, and seen as an obligation and a 'collective investment' (Kleist 2017, 330). Similarly, grandparents and / or other extended family members may, through transnational care arrangements, look after children who are separated from their parents. Both practices reveal the persistence of the domestic moral economy.

The following account draws on Baldassar and Merla's (2013, 30-32) concept of the 'circulation of care' in the transnational family. Here, care is understood as a circulating substance in which care may be unevenly dispersed, highlighting

differences in the quality of care and relations of power between and within families. Further, care is 'governed by the moral codes of family and kinship ties, that is the moral economy' (Ibid., 32). The concept of the moral economy is inspired by E.P. Thompson's (1971) work, which examined resistance and protest in relation to fair food prices for the poor in 18<sup>th</sup> century England, and Scott's (1976) work on the role of a 'subsistence ethic' in guiding 'peasant households' behaviour in Southeast Asia. Literature on the domestic moral economy underscores the significance of social norms, reciprocity and a sense of obligation in kinship relations. Drawing on de Sarden's (1999, 25) understanding of the moral economy of corruption in Africa, I highlight the importance of 'social mechanisms', 'cultural codes' and ethical imperatives that underpin kinship relations and inform our understanding of the domestic moral economy (Kea 2013, 104).

Within West African societies, there has historically been 'an economy of material and symbolic exchanges between the generations' (Bourdieu 1990: 167). Ideally, an older generation provide for youth and socialize them with the expectation that youth will support them in their old age. The Mandinka concept of *dali* ('to become accustomed'), understood here as 'the complexity of an enduring relationship' (Robertson 1987, 252-4), highlights the expectations of endurance, reciprocity and exchange that characterise intergenerational relations (Kea 2013). Although marked by endurance, reciprocity and exchange these relations are not without conflict and tension, a feature of the power dynamics and competing interests within kinship relations. Nonetheless, part of generating wealth through social mobility involves an ability, willingness and obligation to provide financial support. Indeed, following the cultural codes and ethical imperatives of the domestic moral economy, an ability to invest in people conveys status and symbolises social and material wealth (cf. Guyer

1993). Further, the same principle is followed in relation to ‘wealth in people’: Gambians invest in people and social relations to (re) produce status and social mobility because they benefit both socially and materially from the claims to which such an investment gives rise (Guyer 1993; Kea 2010, 9).

The domestic moral economy underpins the intergenerational relations that are central to West African fostering arrangements. Such arrangements, in turn, facilitate educational migration and transnational care. West African fostering arrangements - in which children are separated from their parents and sent to live with relatives or friends, in order to attend school, provide labour, affirm relations - is relatively common across different ethnic groups and social classes (Goody 1978, 227; Bledsoe and Sow 2011, 748). As well as affirming kinship and friendship networks, fostering establishes relations of patronage between adults, and intergenerational reciprocity between children, parents and carers (Bledsoe 1990). Indeed, as previously discussed, migration and transnational mobility may depend on the establishment of caring arrangements and the management of relations with extended kin: Gambian migrant parents primarily approach their parents, or alternatively other extended family members. Occasionally, grandparents will offer to care for their grandchildren. As grandparents and extended family frequently benefit from migrants’ remittances, they feel a sense of obligation to care for their grandchildren. Indeed, research in Mali and the Republic of Congo highlights the importance of care-giving to the maintenance of transnational relations (Whitehouse, 2009).

However, not all migrants remit or are successful in arranging care with grandparents, or other extended family members, and are therefore unable to send their children back or migrate at all. The lack of willingness to remit or to care for grandchildren challenges the sense of reciprocity and obligation that are central to the

domestic moral economy. Such behaviour can result in “a domestic or community anomie” (Watts 1993, 184). By contrast, grandparents and the children who are put into their care usually become closer and develop stronger bonds. As carers work in the interests of their children, grandchildren, and extended family more generally, they fulfil an obligation to achieve harmony in domestic life (*badingya*) (Wooten 2009, 23). When they are able to put effective caring relations into place, as was the case with Awa and Mustapha, parents and transnational families effectively ‘respond to the disruptive potential of economic globalization and parental migration’ (Yarris 2014, 292 with reference to Olwig 1999).

Awa and Mustapha initially took the decision to send Muhammed back to The Gambia to live with her parents when he was a baby. Her parents were keen to offer support in order to help Awa and Mustapha with their education and careers in the UK. At the time of the interview they had three children, but were not planning on sending the other two to live in The Gambia.

P: ‘How do you think he benefited from being there?’

Awa: ‘Discipline wise. He listens to me more than this one. [She points to Muhammed’s younger brother Abdullah]. He knows the language (Mandinka) as well. He’s aware of the love surrounding him because he was brought up by the grandparents, and everybody loves him. The attention. I think he enjoyed that. Also, he’s more sociable than the others. You can see the difference. When we went for holiday, he was excited, like me. He was happy. It’s benefited him by giving him a good foundation in terms of behaviour.’

Muhammed had a positive experience of separation because he was well cared for and received attention from family and friends. His grandmother described the routinized

nature of daily life – food preparation, clothes washing, cooking, house work, school – once he was old enough to attend primary school -, *dara* (koranic school), home work, discipline and managing the flow of remittances – that formed the basis of Muhammed's care and socialization. A willingness to provide care as well as success in the caring relationship demonstrates a strength of character on the part of the carer and an 'ability to provide *danghkundiro* (the calming or easing of others)' (Whittemore & Beverly 1996, 53), a feature of the domestic moral economy.

His parents were also strategic in putting in place the care arrangements that would ensure Muhammed would be loved and exposed to specific cultural practices, education, forms of knowledge and behaviour. Here, education includes the cultivation of certain attributes as well as exposure to Islamic education. Significantly, they were able to return to The Gambia to leave Muhammed with Awa's parents and to visit him on several occasions. (Those Gambians who are residing in the UK and in the process of applying for a visa, or have overstayed on their existing visa and are unable to leave the country, may have their children return with a visiting relative or friend). These visits were particularly important because Skype, Facetime and other forms of video chat had not yet been introduced at the beginning of the millennia. Muhammed's socialization, care, and his experiences of daily life in The Gambia were punctuated by these visits. Here, migration status - Awa and Mustapha both had student visas - allowed them to leave the UK on a temporary basis, travelling back and forth from The Gambia. They were able to visit him on two occasions for several weeks during the six years he was in The Gambia, and on a few other occasions for shorter periods - a privilege that is not available to all Gambian parents who are separated from their children.

Once Mustapha had finished his studies, he was successful in gaining a work visa to teach accountancy at a higher education college. His experience was unusual

because - although a lengthy process involving interviews and documentary evidence to support his application - it was relatively straightforward for him to regularize his status. This was partly because of his income and support from his future employers. Indeed, Mustapha's ability to obtain well paid employment and a work visa, both economic and social resources, meant that he and Awa were in a position to make strategic decisions about Muhammed's secondary education in the UK. Such educational plans were designed to secure Muhammed's future by giving him the opportunity to attend secondary school and University in the UK and, ultimately, obtain professional employment as an adult. Yet, such opportunities were only possible because of Mustapha and Awa's educational and employment trajectories. In this sense, migration regulations are, for some, a key factor in influencing educational decision-making for themselves and their children. Further, as the conditions for achieving a work visa become increasingly stringent, increasing numbers of migrants on student or visitor visas may overstay, with those who can afford to enrolling in educational institutions in order to renew their student visas and / or to gain qualifications that will help them to gain work visas. As the next case reveals, parents and children may be separated indefinitely because of migration barriers, with parents having to delay their educational plans for their children.

### **Educational Planning, Migration Status and Care**

Having received a scholarship to study in Germany, Pa, one of my interviewees, left The Gambia in 1999. He travelled back and forth between Germany and The Gambia, eventually marrying, starting a family and making plans to settle back in The Gambia. However, his stay in The Gambia was short lived because he felt the country was unsafe under Jammeh's rule. He returned to Germany for a short period, moving

to London shortly after, with the intention of having his wife and children join him. Binta, his wife, moved to London soon after Pa. Their children - Alieu was twelve at the time of the interview and Fatou was nine - were left in The Gambia with their paternal grandmother, Matty, when they were six and four respectively. Fully aware that she was supporting Pa and Binta's studies in the UK, Matty was happy to care for her grandchildren. As Matty explained:

‘He wanted them to come one by one. It is cheaper for them to be in The Gambia. So he decided to bring Binta first, when she settled, she too gets a job or studies, then they planned to bring the children. And that is what the plan was. But he never thought to bring all of them at once.’

At the time of the interview in 2012, Alieu and Fatou were still living in The Gambia with their paternal grandmother, waiting to be reunited with their parents. Although Matty explained that Pa and Binta were trying to save enough money for the children to join them, Pa's sister hinted that they could not return to The Gambia for a visit because their temporary student visas had expired. They were unable to gain work visas or to afford the cost of enrolling in an educational institution in order to renew their student visas. Given the precarity of their positions, leaving the UK would have made Pa and Binta vulnerable to forced removal.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, they were unable to have their children leave The Gambia to join them in the UK.

In cases where migrants are in a legal position to regularize their status, the exorbitant costs and frequently lengthy nature of the application process, and the nature of documentary evidence that accompanies it, make it difficult to do so. This, in turn, restricts migrants' attempts to apply for family reunification. Such restrictions and uncertainty make it difficult for parents to make decisions about their education and



work, as well as their children's education. Indeed, parental educational decision making may become ad hoc as they are forced to respond to changing circumstances. Here, Pa and Binta, lack the documentation and status, or economic and social resources that would help them to fulfil their educational plans for their children in the UK, thereby securing their futures and those of their children. In this instance, Alieu and Fatou's educational futures in the UK are entangled with their parents' migratory trajectories and contingent on their ability to secure visas.

During this period of waiting and hoping for a work visa, Pa and Binta both worked in low paid jobs, yet were able to send money, books, toys and other items via friends and family, to Matty, the children and other extended family members. Within this context, Pa and Binta have the time to work and improve their qualifications before applying for work permits. Here, we can frame time as a resource that affects their 'choices and opportunities' (Froerer and Portische 2012, 334). At the same time, they are able to send additional remittances to Matty that cover the costs incurred in caring for their children and that are central to social reproduction.

Fatou has a distant memory of her parents because she was five when they left. Nonetheless, she was able to skype with them and was grateful for the gifts they would send: 'They normally send us clothes, shoes, books and toys. We can also Skype. I tell them about school and that I miss them. But I know they are working so that they can send us things and help us here in Gambia.' Fatou shows me some of the clothing her parents have sent, conveying her embodied experience of parental intimacy and care (cf. Kea 2016). Similarly, they send money to Matty to cover domestic and childcare related expenses. Yet, Alieu, who has a stronger memory of his parents, expresses frustration at having to wait to see them.

P: What do you talk about when you Facetime your parents?

Alieu: Please send me more clothes, paper and pens for school, a football. Different things.

P: Do you talk about anything else?

Alieu: Still we're waiting to see them. I want to go to live with them in the UK and go to school there. We keep waiting but my parents say to be patient that they are working on it.

Despite the uncertainty and precarity of their lives, Pa and Binta not only fulfill their parental obligation of material support by covering the costs of social reproduction but too ensuring a virtual connection with their children.

Similarly, Matty, Alieu and Fatou's grandmother and carer, use this period of waiting to positive effect as her relations with her grandchildren deepen with time. As Matty explains: 'They are waiting for the visa. They have been refused but soon they will get the visa, inshallah, and send for the children.' In incorporating and managing the practice of waiting, Matty uses it as a disciplinary tool, and a productive resource. Powerless to the whims of the British state, and its regulatory machinery, she converts this powerlessness and sense of uncertainty into a childcare and socialization strategy. Here, waiting becomes a part of the way she cares for her grandchildren. She advises Alieu and Fatou to be good so that they can see their parents and go to school in the UK. But she warns them that if they misbehave, they will have to wait for longer before they join their parents. Such acts highlight 'the ambiguities of waiting ... waiting as it is actively experienced, and ... the activism that takes place in waiting' (Conlon 2011, 356 with reference to Mountz 2011). Matty harnesses and appropriates the act of waiting, using it as a form of care and

socialization. This, in turn, underpins the importance of enduring relations (*dali*), particularly across the generations. Indeed, when Pa asked his mother to care for his children, he invoked the dynamics of inter-generational exchange and support that underpin the domestic moral economy, as well as actively affirmed the familiar disciplinary culture of his childhood (cf. Bledsoe and Sow 2011, 748–55). Here, disciplinary child rearing, the care and enduring relations that are central to the domestic moral economy, can be read as a form of activism that takes place in waiting. She mitigates the effects of a potential loss of an educational future in the UK by ensuring they achieve at school in The Gambia, and are socialised and disciplined into appropriate behaviour. As well as feeding, clothing, loving, and instilling a sense of Gambian sociality, Matty attempts to secure and save their futures through a strict Gambian education - formal western education and Islamic (Koranic school) - , patience and discipline. Ultimately, such an educational strategy is influenced by migration legislation and the children's inability to move to the UK. Similarly, the choice of where to give birth can serve as a long-term strategy in which Gambian parents, through their own educational and migratory trajectories, attempt to secure their children's migration status and educational futures, as the following case reveals.

### **Migration, reproduction and educational futures**

Ama, a forty year old mother of four, lives in The Gambia with her four children and her husband Sheriff. He trained as an accountant in the UK and now works for a Bank in The Gambia. Ama received a scholarship from the Gambian government to study computer programming in the Middle East for her first degree and met Sheriff in the UK while working there as a casual farm labourer in the

summer. She now works for a telecommunications company in The Gambia. Both are Gambian citizens. Ama gave birth to Mariamma, her eldest daughter who is now thirteen, while they were living in the UK. She subsequently travelled to the US on two separate occasions to give birth to her third and fourth children, thereby securing their American citizenship. (The US remains one of the few countries where those who are born in the country are automatically entitled to citizenship). Ama was fortunate in that she was able to stay with close friends for several months. However, as a Gambian with a well-paid professional job, it was always her intention to return to her life and family in The Gambia. By giving birth to her children in the US, she sought to secure their educational futures because of the choice to study and live in the US that American citizenship affords.

Reproductive decisions that involve considered calculations about when and where to have children, can be read as an act of political expression. In Binta and Sheriff's case such decisions can mitigate the effects of draconian migration legislation by providing clear paths to citizenship for their children. Binta timed her visit to the US to ensure that she would give birth to two of her children there. Similarly, they made the decision to have Mariamma in the UK, while Sheriff completed his accountancy training. In so doing, they challenged the injunctions that are dictated by an unfair migration regime, simultaneously mapping out educational futures for their children. Both reveal the entangled nature of parents' migratory trajectories, informed by their past educational decision-making, and their children's migration status and educational futures.

Mariamma, who was born in the UK, is not automatically entitled to British citizenship because neither of her parents are British. In order to have been granted British citizenship at birth, either Ama or Sheriff would have needed permanent

residency. Alternatively, Mariamma would have had to have lived in the UK for the first ten years of her life, spending no more than ninety days outside the country, or returned to live there for five years, after which point she would be able to apply for permanent residency. Yet, citizenship remains a privilege and a commodity because of the exorbitant cost.<sup>6</sup>

In an attempt to ensure Mariamma would be granted permanent residency, Ama sent her to the UK when she was eleven to attend school. She lived with Angel, Ama's close friend, and the daughter of close friends of Ama's parents. This arrangement illustrates the 'wealth in people' principle, which underpins the domestic moral economy, where Gambians benefit both socially and materially from their extensive social relations and their investment in people, as well as rely on the mutual exchange and reciprocity that are central to these relations.

She attended the local state comprehensive school in Woolwich. 'I went to school in the UK for two years and really liked it,' Mariamma proudly states in her half British / half Mandinka accent. 'There was so much to do, with lots of friends and you could visit so many places.' Yet, Mariamma had to return to The Gambia after two years: Ama had initially travelled to the UK with Mariamma to ensure that she was settled at school and at home with Angel, who became Mariamma's carer. According to Ama's account, a social worker from social services had approved this informal arrangement. Yet, in the middle of Mariamma's stay, a new social worker began to question the arrangement, visiting Angel and her family on several occasions. She threatened to take Mariamma into state care if Angel did not become her legal guardian and fill out a vast array of paperwork in attempts to formalize an arrangement that was modeled on an informal West African fostering arrangement of care. 'The situation was so difficult', Ama states. She travelled to the UK with the

intention of ensuring that Mariamma could continue with her education there. Yet, she was also aware of how stressful her friend Angel found the situation, particularly because she and her husband had five of their own children to care for. Faced with the inflexibility of social services, Ama had to bring Mariamma back to The Gambia.

In stating that her daughter will ‘make her way here in The Gambia’, Ama expresses relief that she is safely at home in The Gambia, mixed with a sense of disappointment and resolution that her daughter will not be able to gain permanent residency in the UK, attend school there and avail herself of the opportunities that life in the UK could provide. At the time of my research, Mariamma was attending a local private school near their home in The Gambia and seeing a tutor who would visit their home several times a week.

While Mariamma was living in the UK, separated from her parents and siblings, the family were in a state of limbo, unsure as to whether educational plans and strategizing for the future would come to fruition. During this period, it was hoped that Mariamma would secure her permanent residency and, subsequently become a British citizen. Part of her imagined future, Ama told me of her plans to join her two youngest children in the US or the eldest in Britain later in her life. Here again, we see the way in which parental migratory trajectories are partly undertaken in order to secure particular educational futures for their children, revealing the entanglement between the two.

The return and transition to life in The Gambia were difficult for Mariamma: ‘All I do here is study, go to school (local private school), go to *dara* (Koranic school), see my tutor and sleep.’ Mariamma is forced to readjust her expectations and adapt to living with tighter parental controls. Ama tells me that they argue a lot because she doesn’t do as she is told: ‘Here, you have to organize all their time so

they do not get into any mischief. They have to have a tutor so they do well in school. Hopefully, she will get a scholarship to study elsewhere. So, she has more opportunities.’ Undeterred by Mariamma’s experience in the UK, Ama carefully maps out an alternative educational future for Mariamma that involves University study abroad. It was always Ama and Sheriff’s intention to give Mariamma the transnational educational opportunities that she and her husband had had in order to secure her eldest daughter’s future. Indeed, their experience of educational migration and transnationalism has served as a template for their children’s educational futures, and, in this sense, is foundational to it.

## **Conclusion**

Gambians’ experiences of educational migration, as they undertake transnational journeys, and plan for their and their children’s educational futures, underscore the entangled nature of parents’ educational and migratory trajectories with those of their children. I have argued that the entangled nature of their educational strategies and migratory trajectories highlights the persistence of the domestic moral economy, marked by a sense of obligation and reciprocity in kinship relations. As parents migrate to the UK, send children back or leave them with their grandparents, they mobilize intergenerational reciprocities: grandparents provide care for their grandchildren and migrant parents support them through increased remittances. Further, the domestic moral economy, in which kin invest in and support kin - and the principle of wealth in people that underpins it - , is central to culturally specific notions of status and social mobility (Forere and Portische 2012, 334).

Parents position themselves in such a way as to invest in their own educational futures and those of their children. In this sense, parents’ perceived ability to secure

their children's futures depend on their own educational and migratory trajectories. An ability to migrate, stay in the U.K. or develop translational lives – traveling freely to and from The Gambia – is central to securing particular futures. Further, access to economic, social and cultural resources can facilitate such mobility and the opportunity to extend educational opportunities that support the development of careers in the UK (cf. Olwig and Valentin 2015, 247). Ultimately, the availability of various resources (e.g. an educational scholarship, well-paid employment in the UK or The Gambia, a UK work visa or supportive transnational care arrangements) affects the nature of educational decision-making and futures. Yet, Gambian migrants in the UK may be subjected to strict migration legislation, which potentially curtails their mobility and that of their children, thereby affecting their ability to plan for their children's educational futures. In this sense, parents' educational and migratory trajectories are entangled with those of their children partly because of the way in which they are forced to navigate migration regulations.

Valentin (2012, 430) calls for the need to see '...the social and geographical space of migration as a learning environment in itself' and refers to 'a variety of learning practices' (Ibid.431) that influence experiences of migration as well as future mobility choices. Indeed, the 'transformative potential' (Valentin Ibid.,) of migration - with its enhanced opportunities as well as various constraints - means that the Gambian parents, and carers, involved in my research were adept at reworking educational strategies and care arrangements to suit developing work opportunities and changing circumstances, even in the face of strict migration legislation which rendered some immobile.



## References:

- Adi, Hakim. 2012. "African Political Thinkers, Pan-Africanism and the Politics of Exile, c. 1850–1970. Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Studies in Ethnicity." *Migration and Diaspora* 30 (2/3): 263–91. doi.org/10.1080/02619288.2010.502718.
- Baas, Michiel. 2006. "Students of Migration: Indian Overseas Students and the Question of Permanent Residency." *People and Place* 14(1): 8–23.
- Baldassar Loretta and Laura Merla. 2013. "Locating Transnational Care Circulation in Migration and Family Studies." In *Transnational Families, Migration, and the Circulation of Care: Understanding Mobility and Absence in Family Life*, edited by Loretta Baldassar and Laura Merla, 25–58. London: Routledge.
- Berg, Mette Louise. 2014. "'La Lenin is my Passport': Schooling, Mobility and Belonging in Socialist Cuba and its Diaspora." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 22, 303–17. doi.10.1080/1070289X.2014.939189.
- Bledsoe Caroline. 1990. "'No success without struggle': Social Mobility and Hardship for Foster Children in Sierra Leone." *Man* 25(1): 70–88.
- Bledsoe, Caroline and Pa Sow. 2011. "Back to Africa: Second Chances for the Children of West African Immigrants." *Journal of Marriage and Family* (73): 747–762. doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2011.00843.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. *The Logic of Practice* (trans. R.Nice). Cambridge: University Press.
- Boyden, Jo 2013. "'We're not Going to Suffer like this in the Mud': Educational Aspirations, Social Mobility and Independent Child Migration among Populations Living in Poverty." *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*. 43 (5): 580–600. doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2013.821317.
- Brettell, Caroline. 2006. "Introduction: Global Spaces/ Local Places: Transnationalism, Diaspora, and the Meaning of Home." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 13 (3): 327–334. doi: 10.1080/10702890600837987.
- Conlon, Deirdre. 2011. "Waiting: Feminist Perspectives on the Spacings/Timings of Migrant (Im)mobility." *Gender, Place and Culture*. 3: 353–360. doi: 10.1080/0966369X.2011.566320.
- Creswell, Tim. 2010. "Towards a Politics of Mobility." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28 (1):17–31. doi.org/10.1068/d11407.
- de Sarden, O. 1999. "A Moral Economy of Corruption in Africa." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 37: 25–52.

Froere, Peggy and Anna Portisch. 2012. "Introduction to the Special Issue: Learning, Livelihoods and Social Mobility" *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* 43(4): 332-343. doi:10.1111/j.1548-1492.2012.01188.

Goody, Esther. 1978. "Some Theoretical and Empirical Aspects of Parenthood in West Africa." In *Marriage, Fertility, and Parenthood in West Africa*, edited by Christine Oppong et al., 227–272. Canberra: Australian National University.

Guyer, Jane. 1993. "Wealth in people and self-realization in Equatorial Africa" *Man* (N.S.) 28: 243-265. Dx. doi.org/10.2307/2803412.

Harvey, David. 1989. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Katz, Cindi. 2001. "Vagabond Capitalism and the Necessity of Social Reproduction." *Antipode* 33 (4): 709–28. doi.org/10.1111/1467-8330.00207.

Katz, Cindi. 2008. "Cultural Geographies Lecture: Childhood as Spectacle: Relays of Anxiety and the Reconfiguration of the Child" *Cultural Geographies* 15 (1): 5-17. doi: 10.1177/1474474007085773.

Kea Pamela. 2010. *Land, Labour and Entrustment: West African Female Farmers and the Politics of Difference*. Leiden: Brill.

Kea, Pamela. 2013. "The Complexity of an Enduring Relationship: Gender, Generation and the Moral Economy of the Gambian Mandinka Household." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. 19 (1):102-119.

Kea, Pamela. 2016. "Photography and Technologies of Care: Migrants in Britain and Their Children in the Gambia." In *Affective Circuits: African Migration to Europe and the Pursuit of Social Regeneration*. Edited by Jennifer Cole and Christian Groes. Chicago: University Press.

Kebbeh C. Omar. 2013. "The Gambia: Migration in Africa's 'Smiling Coast'." Available at: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/gambia-migration-africas-smiling-coast>

Kleist, Nauja. 2017. "Disrupted Migration Projects: the Moral Economy of Involuntary Return to Ghana from Libya." *Africa* 27 (2): 322-42.

Mountz, Alison. 2011. "Where Asylum-seekers Wait: Feminist Counter-topographies of Sites between States." *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 18(3): 381-399. doi: 10.1080/0966369X.2011.566370.

Olwig, Karen Fog. 1999. "Narratives of the Children Left Behind: Home and Identity in Globalised Caribbean Families." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 25(2): 267-284. doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.1999.9976685.

Olwig, Karen Fog and Karen Valentin. 2015. "Mobility, Education and Life Trajectories: New and Old Migratory Pathways." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 22 (3): 1–11 doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2014.939191.

- Orellana, Marjorie Faulstich et al. 2001. "Transnational Childhoods: The Participation of Children in Processes of Family Migration." *Social Problems* 48 (4): 572–91. doi.org/10.1525/sp. 2001.48.4.572.
- Peterson, Nicolas and John Taylor. 2003. "The Modernising of the Indigenous Moral Economy." *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*. 4 (1-2): 105-122. doi.org/10.1080/14442210310001706407.
- Robertson, A.F. 1987. *The Dynamics of Productive Relationships: African Share Contracts in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Scott, James. 1976. *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Spronk, Rachel. 2014. "Exploring the Middle Classes in Nairobi: From Modes of Production to Modes of Sophistication." *African Studies Review*. 57 (1): 93-114. doi.org/10.1017/asr.2014.7.
- Thompson, E. P. 1971. "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century." *Past and Present* 50:76-136. [doi.org/10.1093/past/50.1.76](https://doi.org/10.1093/past/50.1.76).
- Valentin, Karen. 2012. "The Role of Education in Mobile Livelihoods: Social and Geographical Routes of Young Nepalese Migrants in India." *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*. 43(4): 429-442. doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1492.2012.01195.
- Vertovec, Steven. 2001. "Transnationalism and Identity." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27, 573-582. doi.org/10.1080/13691830120090386.
- Waldinger, Roger and David Fitzgerald. 2004. "Transnationalism in Question." *American Journal of Sociology* 109 (5): 1177-1195. doi.org/ 10.1086/381916.
- Waters, Joanne. 2006. "Geographies of Cultural Capital: Education, International Migration and Family Strategies between Hong Kong and Canada." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 31, 179-192. doi: 10.1111/j.1475-5661.2006.00202.
- Waters, Joanne. 2015. "Educational Imperatives and the Compulsion for Credentials: Family Migration and Children's Education in East Asia." *Children's Geographies*, 13 (3): 280–293. doi.org/10.1080/14733285.2015.972646.
- Watts, Michael. 1993. "Idioms of Land and Labour: Producing Politics and Rice in Senegambia." In *Land Agrarian Systems*, edited by T.J. Bassett & D.E. Crummey, 157-93. Madison: University.
- Whitehouse Bruce. 2009 "Transnational Childrearing and the Preservation of Transnational Identity in Brazzaville, Congo." *Global Networks* 9(1): 82–99. doi: 10.1111/j.1471-0374.2009.00243.

Whitemore, Robert and Elizabeth Beverly. 1996. "Mandinka Mothers and Nurslings: Power and Reproduction." *Anthropological Quarterly* 10: 45-62.  
[doi.org/10.1525/maq.1996.10.1.02a00060](https://doi.org/10.1525/maq.1996.10.1.02a00060).

Wooten, Stephen. 2009. *The Art of Livelihood: Creating Expressive Agriculture in Rural Mali*. Durham, N.C.: Academic Press.

Yarris, Kristin Elizabeth. 2014. "'Quiero ir y no quiero ir' (I Want to Go and I Don't Want to Go): Nicaraguan Children's Ambivalent Experiences of Transnational Family Life." *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*. 19 (2): 284-309.  
[doi.org/10.1111/jlca.12079](https://doi.org/10.1111/jlca.12079).

---

<sup>1</sup> The research was supported by the Rockefeller Foundation (grant 2008 SRC 114) and The University of Sussex Research Development Fund.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2018/08/16/returning-libyan-detention-young-gambians-try-change-migration-exodus-mindset>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.actionaid.it/app/uploads/2019/12/Rimpatri-e-Gambia\\_ENG2.pdf](https://www.actionaid.it/app/uploads/2019/12/Rimpatri-e-Gambia_ENG2.pdf); Author's fieldwork in The Gambia, November 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Gambians citizens are able to enter The UK for a limited period on one of the following visas: Work; Business; Study; Visitor; Family; Settlement and Transit. Visa requirements are becoming increasingly stringent. For work visas there are a range of additional requirements that the migrant must fulfill, including knowledge of English.

<sup>5</sup> Frequently, recently arrived migrants can only secure poorly paid jobs. It often requires two incomes for a couple and family to sustain themselves in the UK and/ or to save enough money to bring the children from The Gambia.

<sup>6</sup> In 2019 it cost £1000 pounds for under eighteens to apply for citizenship and approximately £1300 for over eighteens.